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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effectiveness of using Blackboard, an online software program, to enhance a graduate course in school counseling. Research questions were: (1) does Blackboard enhancement facilitate student learning? and (2) is there a difference in student response to Blackboard by class site (off-campus v. on-campus). Participants were 32 graduate students in 2 sections enrolled in a required school counseling course in a master's counseling program. Materials made available through Blackboard were: syllabus, counselor standards, professional information, lecture notes, and practice tests. Effectiveness measures were usage records from Blackboard, end-of-course student evaluations, and instructor's evaluations. Students in both sections agreed that Blackboard enhancement increased their learning. There was no difference in students' ratings of satisfaction with Blackboard by class site. An appendix contains an annotated list of Web sites for the class. (SLD)

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Running Head: EVALUATION OF ELECTRONIC BLACKBOARD

ED 471 231

Evaluation of Electronic Blackboard Enhancement of a Graduate Course in School Counseling

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November 6, 2002

Chattanooga, TN

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Abstract

This study explored the effectiveness of using Blackboard, an online software program, to enhance a graduate course in school counseling. Research questions were: (1) Does Blackboard enhancement facilitate student learning?; (2) Is there a difference in student response to Blackboard by class site (i.e., off-campus v on-campus)? Materials made available through Blackboard were: syllabus, counselor standards, professional information, lecture notes, and practice tests. Effectiveness measures were usage records from Blackboard, end-of-course student evaluations, and instructor's evaluation. Students in both sections agreed that Blackboard enhancement increased their learning (M=6.68, SD=0.48; scale range 1=Strongly disagree to 7=Strongly agree). There was no difference in students' rating of satisfaction with Blackboard by class site.

Evaluation of Electronic Blackboard Enhancement of a Graduate Course in School Counseling

The purpose of this exploratory descriptive research study, funded by Preparing Teachers to Teach Technology (PT^3) Grant money, was to examine the effectiveness of using Blackboard, an online software program, to enhance the teaching of a graduate course in school counseling. Two research questions drove the inquiry: (1) Does Blackboard enhancement facilitate student learning? and (2) Is there a difference in student response to Blackboard enhancement by class site, that is, off-campus versus on-campus?

Theoretical Framework

Blackboard is one of the more popular software tools provided to university faculties to for online and web-enhanced teaching. Crawford and Thomas-Maddox (2000) and Ruman and Gillette (2001) presented a excellent in-depth descriptions of Blackboard as well as practical ideas for using the software. Velayo (2001) reported evidence of effective pedagogy for both completely online and Blackboard enhanced psychology courses. There is a rapidly growing body of research examining the effectiveness of online teaching (e.g., Howell, 2000; Jansak, 2000; Nicoll & Laudato,1999; Phipps & Merisotis 2000). However, an ERIC search revealed no research that explored the online teaching of counseling courses.

Undoubtedly, there are elements of counselor education, such as developing counseling techniques, that require the face-to-face interaction of a traditional classroom setting. Further, there is much incidental learning that occurs among students and between students and instructor in face-to-face classrooms. The counselor education faculty at the regional state university in which this research was situated was resistant to placing counseling courses completely online. Thus, this study was undertaken to explore the effectiveness of using Blackboard to enhance, rather than to replace, a face-to-face school counseling graduate-level course.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 32 graduate students enrolled in a required school counseling course in the Masters in Counseling program. Ten students (nine female and one male) were enrolled in the off-campus section held Tuesday evenings in a small town 75 miles from the main campus. Twenty-two students (18 female and four male) were in enrolled in the on-campus section held Wednesday evenings in a classroom in the College of Education building on the main campus of the regional state university. Thirty-one of the students were currently employed as public school teachers. Only one student, an international student from Turkey, was a full-time graduate student. Only five of the students had previously taken a Blackboard enhanced class. All of the students were proficient in the use of e-mail and had ready access to the Internet.

Classroom Sites

The classrooms for the face-to-face classes were very different. The on-campus classroom in was well lighted, well ventilated and was equipped with chalkboard, chalk, overhead projector, and a television/VCR. The off-campus class was 75 miles from the main campus and had been scheduled to meet at the university's center in a small rural community. However, due to unexpectedly high enrollments in other classes, the school counseling class was moved out of the university's center to the second floor library of a Methodist Church. The library was a small room with no chalkboard, no overhead projector, and no television/VCR. Two library tables with chairs provided adequate seating and the room was well-lighted and ventilated. The small number of students (10) and the setting provided a "cozy" atmosphere for the counselor education class.

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Procedure

The proposal for this study was reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee at the university. With the agreement that no data would be examined until the final grades had been submitted to the registrar, the Committee did not require that the students be informed of the study.

The instructor e-mailed directions for enrolling in the Blackboard sites when the students enrolled in the two sections of the class. The university provided separate Blackboard sites for each section of the course. As students entered Blackboard, announcements greeted them and directed them to the course syllabus and the state's New School Counselor Standards. (Students used the seven New Counselor Standards to organize a professional portfolio--a semester-long project.) New Blackboard materials were posted each Thursday before 3:00 p.m. Materials placed on the (identical) Blackboard sites were: (1) the course syllabus, (2) links to the state department of education's website, (3) links to professional organizations, for example, American Counseling Association, (4) links to related educational materials, for example, Buros Mental Measurement Yearbook site, (5) weekly lecture notes, (6) short practice tests to reinforce lectures, (7) mid-term and final exams (both were take-home exams). (An annotated list of the online resources used to enhance this course can be found in the Appendix of this paper.)

Data Sources

Effectiveness measures included (1) usage-tracking records from Blackboard, (2) end-of-course student evaluations, and (3) instructor's evaluation. Blackboard software provides a "tracking" option that allowed the instructor to examine the number of times that each student visited specific materials placed on Blackboard. Additionally, the instructor was able to track the time of day that the student visited the materials. The student evaluations of Blackboard were

collected during the last class meeting, after the take-home final exam had been collected. The evaluation sheets were placed in a sealed envelope and were examined after the students' final grades were posted with the registrar's office.

Results

Blackboard Usage

The frequency of student visits to specific Blackboard areas are presented in Table 1. The percentage refers to percentage of Blackboard areas visited, not the percentage of students.

Table 1. Frequency and Percent of Student Visits to Blackboard Areas

Off-Campus Students (N=10)			On-Campus Students (N=22)		
Blackboard Area	Frequency of Visits	Percent of Visits	Blackboard Area	Frequency of Visits	Percent of Visits
Communication Areas	278	9.57%	Communications Areas	208	5.89%
Main Content Areas	2435	83.84%	Main Content Areas	3050	86.42%
Group Areas	9	0.30%	Group Areas	14	0.39%
Student Areas	182	6.26%	Student Areas	257	7.28%
Total	2904	100%	Total	3529	100%

The Blackboard areas visited by off-campus and on-campus students were very similar with the exception of the Communications Areas (Table 1). The percentage of visits for the off-campus students (9.57%) was greater than the percentage (5.89%) visits by the on-campus students.

Because the number of students in each class was different, a mean "frequency of use" score was calculated for each class by dividing the total number of Blackboard visits by the number of students in the class. Thus, an average number of visits per student was calculated as a "frequency of use measure." For the Off-Campus class, the frequency of use was 290.4 (average

number of visits per student). For the On-Campus class, the frequency of use was 160.4. This statistic is somewhat problematic because one very interested student could skew this mean score. However, it allows for a *rough* estimate of the differences in visits by class section.

Student Evaluation Ratings

The instructor developed a Student Evaluation Rating instrument consisting of 22 items followed by seven-point Likert-type item rating scales (1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree). Table 2 presents a summary of the data collected with this instrument by class site.

Table 2. Means of Student Evaluation Ratings by Class Site

Item	Off-Campus (N=10)		On-Campus (N=22)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. The syllabus of this course clearly explained the course requirements	6.80	0.42	6.55	0.74
2. I had easy access to a computer with Internet access.	6.40	1.26	6.86	0.35
3. I used Blackboard to review the course syllabus.	5.70	1.57	6.55	0.74
4. The directions provided for accessing Blackboard were clear and accurate.	6.90	0.32	6.32	0.99
5. I used Blackboard to access lecture notes for the class.	7.00	0.00	6.59	1.30
6. I used Blackboard to communicate with the instructor of this class.	4.50	2.12	5.64	1.71
7. I used Blackboard to communicate with fellow students in this class.	4.00	2.11	3.23	2.27
8. The "links" on Blackboard to supplemental material (e.g. the Research Page) increased my learning in the course.	6.30	1.06	6.05	1.36
9. I used the "practice quizzes" on Blackboard.	6.40	0.84	5.91	1.66
10. The "practice quizzes" on Blackboard increased my learning.	5.90	1.10	5.55	1.63
11. The class that was conducted entirely through Blackboard was as effective as the face-to-face sessions of the class.	4.90	2.08	6.00	1.54
12. I was able to access, download, and print material from the Internet for my professional portfolio.	6.70	0.95	6.77	0.43
13. I had used the Internet for previous courses.	5.40	2.59	6.09	1.82
14. Overall, web-enhancement increased my learning.	6.70	0.67	6.68	0.48
15. I would look forward to taking another web-enhanced course.	6.50	0.85	6.73	0.55
16. I liked the practice quizzes the best.	5.50	1.35	3.91	1.80
17. The links to other sites were the most useful aspect of Blackboard.	5.50	1.84	5.09	1.72
18. I used the Blackboard site to send an E-mail to groups (or all) of the students in the class.	3.70	2.50	3.09	2.35
19. I would like to use Blackboard to enhance my teaching (or work).	6.10	1.20	5.36	1.53
20. My typing skills are excellent.	5.10	1.10	5.59	1.99
21. I would have liked it if this class had been entirely on line.	4.80	2.20	5.77	2.02
22. I have taken a course that was taught entirely on line.	Yes = 4 40% No = 6 60%		Yes = 13 59% No = 9 41%	

Note: Scale range 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree

With two exceptions, all items were rated above the scale's neutral midpoint of four, Item 7, "I used Blackboard to communicate with fellow students in this class," and Item 18, "I used the Blackboard site to send an E-mail to groups (or all) of the students in the class." Clearly, the Discussion Board and group E-mail functions of Blackboard were not widely used. The relatively large standard deviations for these items indicated that there was greater variation in students' reported use.

The high mean ratings for Item. 12, "I was able to access, download, and print material from the Internet for my professional portfolio," was important because this was one of the main uses of Blackboard planned by the instructor. The high ratings of Item 15, " I would look forward to taking another web-enhanced course," was very encouraging to the instructor. An invitation for additional comments on the evaluation rating instrument drew responses from only nine of the 32 students. The comments were all positive and can be characterized by, "Enjoyed the class." Two students (on campus) suggested that the course would have been better if it had been entirely online; one student (off campus) stated, "Blackboard/Internet is great, it adds to the class, but face-to-face instruction is a must."

Although the small size (N=10) of the class meeting in the library of a Methodist Church off-campus permitted a less formal presentation of material, having Blackboard available for extending learning was extremely valuable for the instructor. In both classes, the students printed the lecture notes from Blackboard and brought them to class (Note that Item 5 evaluating this practice was rated 7.00 on the 7-point scale by the Off-Campus class.) This allowed for more student discussion of issues presented through lecture (less time note taking) and the face-to-face classes became more interactive and personal.

With one exception, all of the students were teaching in the public schools during the day and they were able to share more of their real-world experiences that illuminated the concepts presented through lecture. A great deal of "incidental" learning took place through the face-to-face interactions.

Differences in Ratings by Students by Class Site

Chi-Square Tests for Independence (Gravetter & Wallnau, 1996) were used to test for differences in students' mean ratings of items by class site. Tested with alpha set at .05, no statistically significant differences were found.

Student Usage by Day of the Week

Tables 3 and 4 present data describing student usage by day of the week. Table 3 presents data from the Off-Campus class. The class met Tuesday evenings from 6:00 - 8:40 p.m.

Table 3. Off-Campus Students' Visits by Day of the Week

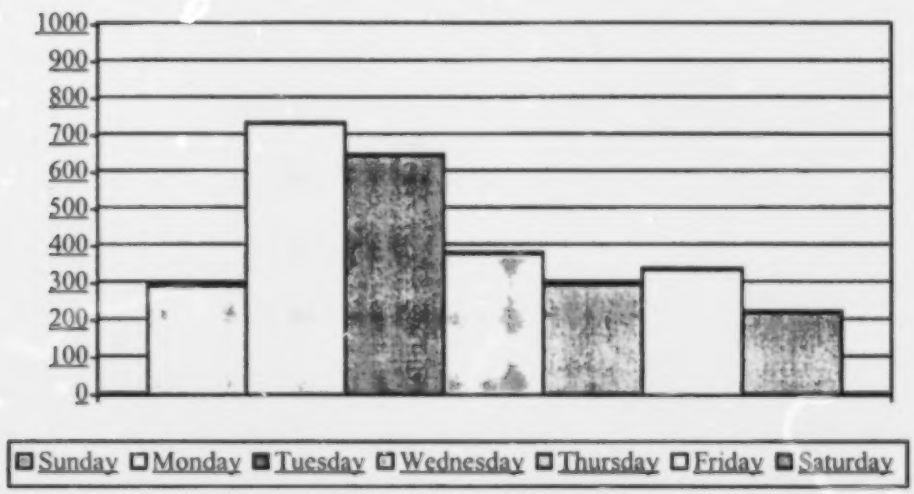

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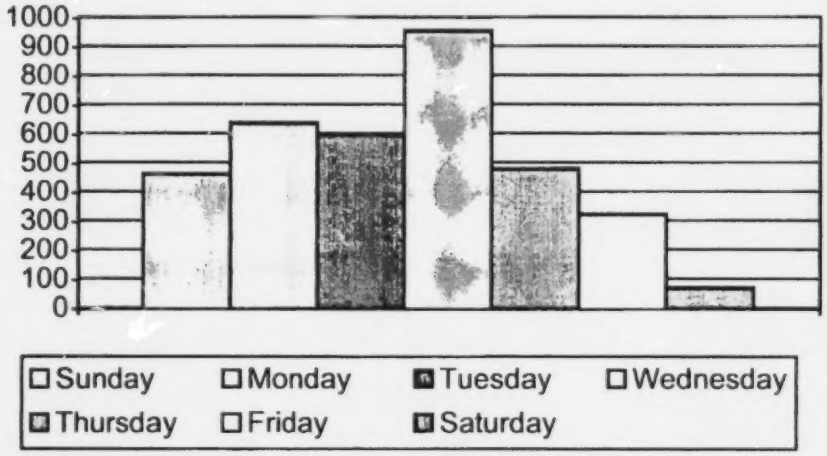
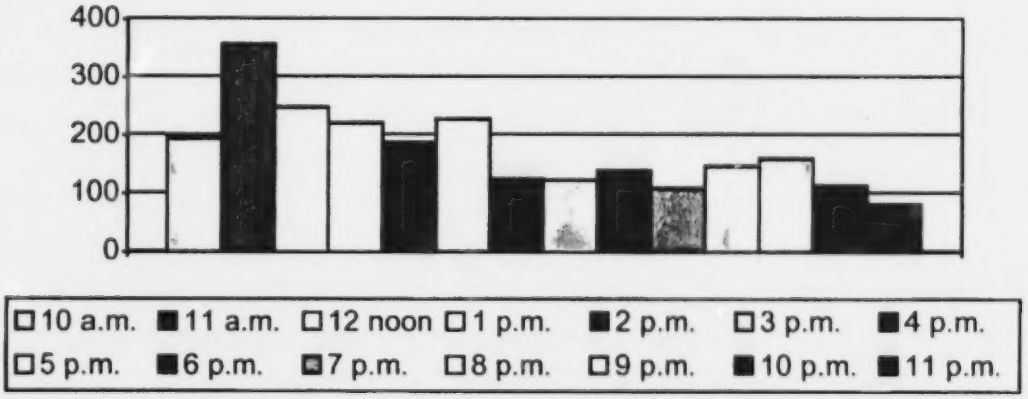
Table 4 presents On-Campus student usage of Blackboard by day of the week. This class met every Wednesday evening from 6:00 to 8:40 p.m.

Table 4. On-Campus Students' Usage by Day of the Week



Students in the Off-Campus class accessed Blackboard most frequently on Monday and Tuesday (Tuesday evening class); Students in the On-Campus class accessed Blackboard most frequently on Wednesday (Wednesday evening class).

Table 5. Off-Campus Students' Usage by Hour of the Day



Note: All times not charted had zero usage.

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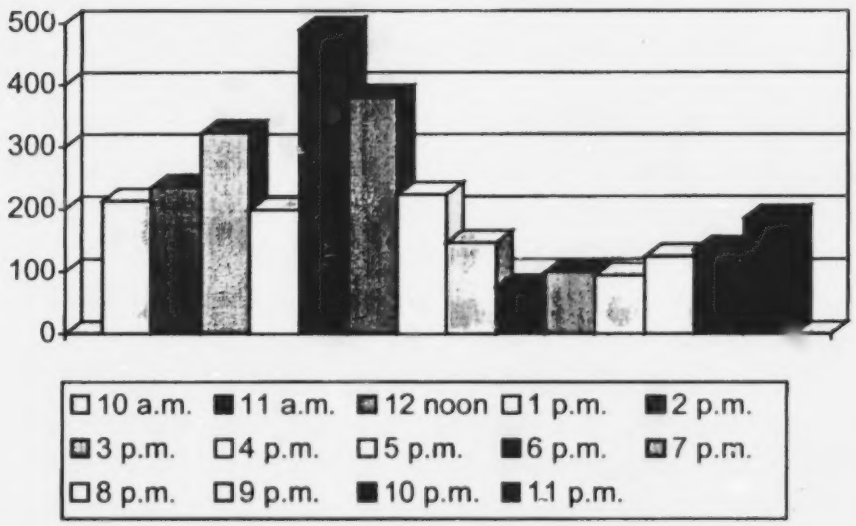
The data presented in Table 5 show that the students in the Off-Campus class most frequently accessed Blackboard at 11:00 a.m. The would indicate that students accessed Blackboard at school (most frequent days were Monday and Tuesdays). Table 6 presents On-Campus student usage by time of day.

Table 6. On-Campus Students' Usage by Time of Day



Note: All times not charted had zero usage.

The On-Campus students most frequently accessed Blackboard at 2 p.m. followed by 3 p.m. On-Campus access was most frequent on Wednesday, the day of class. Thus, teachers most frequently accessed Blackboard at school before coming to class on Wednesday evening.

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Conclusions

This study adds to the very scant literature on using online enhancement for counselor education courses. Blackboard enhancement was very well received by the students in both the off-campus and on-campus sections of a graduate school-counseling course. There was no statistically significant ($p.<.05$) difference in the mean ratings on the students' evaluation forms by class site (on-campus versus off-campus).

Frequency of use was difficult to measure because the calculation of a "frequency of use" mean by dividing the number of student visits by the number of students in each class could easily be skewed by very frequent use by a single student (as was the case in the on-campus site). Students (all but one employed as full-time classroom teachers) most frequently visited the Blackboard site the day before or the day of the evening class. The students most frequently accessed Blackboard at their schools.

From the instructors' point of view, Blackboard was most useful to facilitate learning by providing student access to materials outside of class time. The class was organized around Kentucky's New Counselor Standards (seven). Using Blackboard to guide students to external links that contained information for their portfolios (see Appendix) was an extremely productive use of this technology. Blackboard enhancement provided more face-to-face class time for student discussion and interaction--an important element in a counseling course.

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APPENDIX

Annotated List of Websites

American Counseling Association Code of Ethics

(http://www.counseling.org/resources/codeofethics.htm)

American Counseling Association Testing Ethics

(http://www.counseling.org/resources/codeofethics.htm#ce)

The ACA Ethics of Testing

American School Counselor Association (http://www.schoolcounselor.org/)

ASCA with lots of information and links for school counselors.

Brain-Based Learning and Assessment

(http://www.brainconnection.com/library/?main=eduhome/assessment-intelligence)

This site has links to research studies on "brain-based" learning and assessment.

Buros Mental Measurement Yearbook (http://www.unl.edu/buros/)

Explore the buttons on this link. Search for a test by subject.

Career Clusters (http://www.kde.state.ky.us/osis/voced/proginfo.asp)

Have you used "Career Clusters" for vocational guidance? Are they used in your school? How might these work in elementary school?

Carl Rogers (http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/rogers.html) Information about the father of Client-Centered Therapy. We should hold him in unconditional positive regard perhaps. This site offers good descriptions of Carl Rogers' philosophy and practice.

CATS Matrix - What test is given in which grades?

(http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/commrel/cats/matrix.htm)

You probably already know this, but here is a quick overview.

Elementary School Counselor's Website (http://www.falmouthschools.org/k2counseling/)

This is one excellent example of an elementary school counseling website.

High School Counselor's Link (http://www3.dist214.k12.il.us/guidance/)

This is a list of resources for high school counselors--contains a lot of information and links to other useful websites. Portfolios in the school counselor course are differentiated by school level. That is, students complete an Elementary Portfolio, Middle-School Portfolio, or High School Portfolio.

Kentucky's Core Content for Assessment

(http://www.kde.state.ky.us/oapd/curric/corecontent/core_content_index_version_30.asp)

Although this is state specific, many state Department of Education websites include the content for the statewide accountability test. The student in the school counseling course are asked to link the New Counselor Standards with the Core Content (statewide curriculum guide).

Kentucky's New Counselor Standards (http://www.kde.state.ky.us/osle/coun_stan.pdf)

This website lists Kentucky's New Counselor Standards (7). These were used as the organizing structure for the school counseling course. Readings and lectures were organized around the seven content areas of the standards.

Kentucky Department Education's Scoring Guide for Parents

(http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/commrel/cats/scoring_guide.asp)

Check out the guide for both Kentucky Core Content Tests (KCCT) and CTBS. This site offers scoring information on the statewide accountability test.

Kentucky's Student Performance Standards

(http://www.kde.state.ky.us/comm/pubinfo/standards/)

Choose the standard for the grade level content area in which you teach (or closest grade to yours). Look at the definition of "Proficient" only. What do you think?

Kiersey Personality Test (http://www.keirsey.com/)

Take a personality test online. How is this similar to the MBTI? What is the theoretical base?

Links to Counseling Resources on the NET (http://www.csun.edu/~hfedp001/edpsych.html)

This is a comprehensive list of links by counseling categories.

Mensa site (Check your IQ?) (http://www.mensa.org/)

This site describes Mensa and offers a short IQ "workout". Perhaps an intellectually gifted middle school or high school student would be interested in this site?

National Standards for School Counseling

(http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/ssp/natlstandards.htm)

After extensive research and review, the American School Counselor Association announces the establishment of The National Standards for School Counseling Programs.

Redefinition of School Counselor's Role

(http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/paes/DeWitt-Wallace/Definition.htm)

This site offers information on the DeWitt-Wallace Program's Redefinition of School Counseling.

Research on School Counselor Effectiveness

(http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/ssp/couneffct.pdf)

School Counselor Position Statements

(http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.cfm?L1=1&L2=8)

This will take you right to the Position Statements. (You need to choose 5 for portfolio).

Test Released Items (with answers) from Kentucky's CATS

(http://www.kde.state.ky.us/oaa/implement/KCCT_release/KCCT_items.asp)

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